

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A computer-implemented method comprising:  
storing data about a plurality of member entities that have a relationship with a group entity;  
associating a state variable with each member entity;  
automatically updating the state variable of each member entity with one of a group of predefined, first states, in response to applying one of a set of predefined, rules to analyze some of the stored data, wherein the set of rules are defined in part by the group entity; and  
automatically determining whether or not online content is to be delivered to each member entity based on the state variable of the member entity.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the stored data includes data that has been derived from online interaction between each member entity and the group entity.
3. An article of manufacture having a machine-accessible medium with data stored therein that, when accessed by a machine, associates a state variable with each of a plurality of member entities that have a relationship with a group entity, automatically updates the state variable of each member entity with one of a group of predefined states in response to applying one of a set of predefined rules to analyze some of stored data that is about the plurality of member entities, wherein the set of rules are defined in part by the group entity, and automatically determines whether or not online content is to be delivered to each member entity based on the state variable of the member entity.
4. A computer-implemented method comprising:  
storing data about a plurality of member entities that have a relationship with a group entity;  
associating a state variable with each member entity;

automatically updating the state variable of each member entity with one of a group of predefined, first states, in response to applying one of a set of predefined, rules to analyze some of the stored data, wherein the set of rules are defined in part by the group entity; and

automatically personalizing online content that is to be delivered to each member entity, wherein the state variable determines in part how the online content for the member entity is personalized.

5. The method of claim 4 wherein the stored data includes data that has been derived from online communications between each member entity and the group entity.

6. An article of manufacture having a machine-accessible medium with data stored therein that, when accessed by a machine, associates a state variable with each of a plurality of member entities that have a relationship with a group entity, automatically updates the state variable of each member entity with one of a group of predefined states in response to applying one of a set of predefined rules to analyze some of stored data that is about the plurality of member entities, wherein the set of rules are defined in part by the group entity, and automatically personalizes online content that is to be delivered to each member entity, wherein the state variable determines in part how the online content for the member entity is personalized.

7. A computer-implemented method comprising:  
collecting data about a plurality of member entities that have online interaction with a group entity;  
automatically assigning to a selected one of the plurality of member entities one of a group of predefined, first states, in response to applying one of a set of predefined rules to analyze some of the collected data, wherein the set of rules are defined in part by the group entity; and  
automatically determining whether or not online content is to be delivered to the selected member entity based on the assigned first state.

8. A computer-implemented method comprising:  
collecting data about a plurality of member entities that have online interaction with a group entity; and

automatically assigning to a selected one of the plurality of member entities one of a group of predefined, first states, in response to applying one of a set of predefined rules to analyze some of the collected data, wherein the set of rules are defined in part by the group entity; and

automatically personalizing, for the selected member entity, online content to be delivered to the selected member entity, wherein the assigned first state determines in part how the online content is personalized.

9. A computer-implemented method comprising:

collecting data about a plurality of customers of a merchant, the merchant having online presence; and

automatically assigning to a selected one of the plurality of customers one of a group of predefined, first states, in response to applying one of a set of predefined rules to analyze some of the collected data, wherein the set of rules are defined in part by the merchant; and

automatically personalizing, for the selected customer, online content to be delivered to the selected customer, wherein the assigned first state determines in part how the online content is personalized.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein the collected data relates to one of native data and arbitrary data,

the native data being inherently understandable as relating to the customers,

the arbitrary data being information imported into the system.

11. The method of claim 10 wherein native data includes information gathered from customers' reactions to one of marketing communications and customer service messages from the merchant.

12. The method of claim 10 wherein the arbitrary data includes billing data processed by the merchant offline.

13. The method of claim 9 wherein the personalized online content is one of a) an email message from the merchant, b) an online survey of the merchant, c)

the merchant's Web site content, and d) an online-chat message from the merchant.

14. The method of claim 9 wherein the group of predefined, first states includes the following three states: x) a customer who is less than two weeks old; y) a customer who is at least two weeks old and has purchased a product or used a service of the merchant; and z) a customer who is at least two weeks old and has not used the service.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein the set of predefined rules includes the following rule: if a customer is in state x) and that customer has not purchased a product or used a service of the merchant since signing up more than two weeks ago, then that customer should be re-classified into state z).

16. The method of claim 14 wherein the set of predefined rules allows a user to specify:

- a) which type of customers to obtain information for;
- b) what aspect of their behavior to obtain information for.

17. The method of claim 16 wherein the user can specify, as the type of customers, customers that reside or have an office in a given zipcode and customers of a given gender.

18. The method of claim 16 wherein the user can specify, as the type of customers, those who have used a particular service of the merchant within a given period of time.

19. The method of claim 16 wherein the aspect of their behavior includes what was their reaction to one of a particular email campaign, a given survey, and certain Web content.

20. The method of claim 16 wherein the aspect of their behavior includes how much do they use a particular service of the merchant.

21. The method of claim 9 comprising:

automatically further assigning to the selected customer one of a group of predefined, second states, in response to applying another one of the set of predefined rules to analyze some of the collected data; and

automatically further personalizing said online content to be delivered to the selected customer, wherein the assigned second state determines in part how said online content is further personalized.

22. The method of claim 21 wherein the group of predefined, second states includes the following three states: p) a customer who started with free services but has never used any pay services; q) a customer who started with free services and then used a small amount of pay services; and r) a customer who started with free services and has used a large amount of pay services.

23. The method of claim 10 wherein the marketing communications of the merchant involves sending advertisements via email messages, offering an online survey, and customizing one of the look and content of the merchant's Web site.

24. A method comprising:

a) collecting information about client process interactions with a merchant's server process, the server process being part of an Internet client-server hypertext distributed information retrieval system.

b) collecting information about a plurality of existing customers of the merchant, including associating for each customer information about i) an internet domain used by the customer, ii) the type of domain, iii) a geographic location of the customer, iv) an online connection speed of the customer, and v) a category of use by the customer of the merchant's services;

c) collecting further information about said plurality of existing customers, including associating for each customer information about her i) name, ii) email address, and iii) zip code; and

d) personalizing an online marketing campaign of the merchant, by personalizing online communications that is to be delivered to a client process associated with a customer of the merchant, based on the information collected in a)-c).

25. The method of claim 24 further comprising:

making a prediction about a category of use of the customer, being one of home, office, and mobile user, and the type of domain used by the customer for online communications, based on some of the information collected in a) - c); and

personalizing online content to be delivered to the customer with marketing material of the merchant that is targeted at those who are in said predicted category of use and domain.

26. The method of claim 25 wherein the marketing material is targeted at those who live in a certain state of the United States and are members of a commercial online access provider.

27. The method of claim 24 wherein the collected information includes an online connection speed and browser type of the customer.

28. The method of claim 24 wherein the client process interactions include Web site interactions.

29. The method of claim 24 wherein the type of domain is one of a commercial, Internet service provider domain and a corporate domain.

30. The method of claim 24 wherein the category of use is one of home and technology savvy.

31. The method of claim 24 wherein the personalized online communications is a Web page.